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Brown is 'no shrinking violet'

By Jennifer Skalka
Sun reporter

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Del. Anthony G. Brown is a loud talker. He once confessed to being shushed often by those around him.

Brown is also a fast walker. When he bounds through the halls of the State House, his trench coat flaps open as if he's being propelled by a phantom breeze.

Brown is, no doubt, a man of direction. Speed is his friend. Part lawyer, soldier and elected official, a New Yorker by birth and a Harvard graduate, Brown is built, his supporters say, for bigger things.

And now, with the blessing of Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley, Brown, 44, could find an outlet for that energy, a crowd to welcome the sound of his booming voice. O'Malley, a Democratic candidate for governor, asked Brown over dinner last night to be his running mate. A formal announcement will be made Monday in Brown's Prince George's County district.

Lieutenant governor. It would not be a bad leap for a second-term delegate. It could be argued that Brown, an Army reservist who served for 10 months overseas as senior consultant to the Iraqi transitional government's Ministry of Displacement and Migration, is ready for more than a job that requires attendance at chicken dinners and ribbon-cuttings and municipal tours. The question that lingers, though, is how someone with such polished credentials and drive will fare as the ticket's No. 2 man.

"A proverbial shrinking violet he is not," Sen. Gloria G. Lawlah, a Prince George's County Democrat, said of Brown. "But you know he is respectful, and he seeks out the so-called wisdom of older folks."

So far, Brown is on message, a soldier following his orders.

"I'm enthusiastic and eager to work with Martin O'Malley on behalf of Maryland families," Brown said yesterday in an interview.

Anthony Gregory Brown was born in Huntington, N.Y., on Nov. 21, 1961, to a Cuban-born physician raised in Jamaica and a homemaker of Swiss birth. Brown is a fraternal twin; the pair are the youngest of five Brown children.

Andrew Brown, the delegate's twin, said in an interview earlier this year that his brother was "probably the most mature and focused of all of us." "My father actually viewed Anthony as kind of like the unofficial older brother," said Andrew Brown, who works in film production in Los Angeles.

Brown played football for two years at Huntington High School before being stymied by his size. (Brown topped out at 5 feet 9 1/2 inches tall.)

"I realized these guys were getting a little too big for me," he said.

With that, it was on to lacrosse. In 11th grade, Brown captained his team. He passed on sports altogether as a senior, running successfully instead for student government president.

While his classmates beam bright teenage smiles in their high school yearbook pictures, Brown's photo shows a serious young man, lips pursed together, wearing a jacket and tie.

Brown holds a degree in government from Harvard University. At Harvard, he said, he was on the student advisory committee to the Institute of Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government. He rowed crew his freshman year.

Otherwise, Brown said, his studies were his primary focus at Harvard: "I spent too much time in the library."

The law had long intrigued Brown, who credits his sixth-grade teacher for initially planting that seed. She recognized that Brown tried to argue his way though everything. "My teacher told me that's what I would be when I grew up," Brown recalled.

She was right. Brown graduated from Harvard Law, where he was a member of the Black Law Students Association with another man who would become a rising Democratic star, Barack Obama.

Brown met his wife, Patricia Arzuaga, in law school. They have two children, Rebecca, 10, and Jonathan, 5.

"Once he decides on a course of action, he throws himself into that 100 percent," Arzuaga said. "That's exciting to be around."

Brown moved to Largo when he accepted a job clerking for the chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces. After the clerkship, Brown took an associate position at Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering in Washington. There for four years, he was a litigator representing mutual fund companies, investment advisers and securities firms. In his final year, he won the firm's pro bono award.

Former state attorney general Stephen H. Sachs, now a counsel at the firm, met Brown before the young lawyer started work there. Brown sought Sachs out to gab about politics.

Sachs, who counts himself as a fan of Brown's, referred him to former Del. Timothy F. Maloney, political analyst and Montgomery County developer Blair Lee IV and other state political savants so he could start to learn his way around Maryland politics.

"I think he had a bright future at the firm, but politics called," Sachs said.

Brown left the firm to run for office. He won his bid for the House of Delegates in 1998, was named vice chairman of the House Judiciary Committee in 2003 and majority whip in 2005. Brown missed this year's Assembly session, however, after being called to active duty in Iraq. He is a lieutenant colonel in the Judge Advocate General's Corps of the Army.

House Speaker Michael E. Busch, who tapped Brown for the leadership positions, called the delegate "one of the most capable people I've had the opportunity to serve with in my 20 years in the General Assembly."

Brown also sits on the special committee investigating Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.'s personnel practices. He said last night that he has submitted to Busch a letter of resignation from that panel.

Brown said yesterday that of all his experiences, his time in the Assembly has best prepared him for the lieutenant governor's job.

"It's critical," he said, "that the executive branch understand the legislative process and how it works, not only the processes but the personalities in the institution."